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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, February 8, 1940

Subject: "MATERIALS FOR MEN'S SHIRTS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Publication available, Farmers Bulletin 1837-F, Cotton Shirts for Men and Boys.

—ooOoo—

The other day, Isabel, one of my friends, went to a sale, and bought four blue shirts for Henry, her husband. Henry didn't care for them. "Don't you know I always wear white shirts?" he protested. "And that material is no good." Junior, their 12-year-old son, spoke up. "Mother, I don't see why you try to buy shirts for father. He always blows a fuse when you do."

Before she went shopping, I wish Isabel might have seen a new bulletin from the Bureau of Home Economics which I have here this morning. Then maybe Henry wouldn't have "blown a fuse." The title of the bulletin is "Cotton Shirts for Men and Boys." This bulletin will give Isabel a lot of pointers about selecting shirts,—white and other kinds— for both members of her family. I shall see that she gets a copy.

On the inside cover, all the major qualities of good shirts are summarized. The bulletin says: If you want a good-quality business shirt, look for firm, smooth fabric with a high yarn count; all parts preshrunk; permanent color; the design or pattern matched at the collar, front pleat, and pocket; well-matched, flat, sharp, collar points; close, even stitches, about 20 to the inch; even, clear, smooth, four-hole pearl buttons, sewed on with many stitches; firm, neat button holes, large enough to slip over the buttons easily, made with highly mercerized thread; and full cut for comfort.

If you're buying a practical good-quality work-shirt, you look for strength and durability, comfort according to the season, and a fabric that's not too hard



to wash. You want a firmly woven, strong, smooth fabric with no sizing; high yarn count; all parts preshrunk; permanent color; close, even stitching, about 16 stitches to the inch; triple stitched seams; pearl or composition buttons; firm buttonholes; neat collar and front pleat, and an interlined collar.

As shirts vary but little in style, the bulletin says that differences in quality are chiefly due to the material, workmanship, and fit. The materials commonly used for business shirts are broadcloth, oxford, madras, end-to-end madras, and light-weight chambray. For work shirts, the cotton fabrics named are heavy chambray, covert, khaki, and jean. Woven or knitted mesh fabrics are popular for sports shirts, also oxford shirting, which has a rather open texture, due to its basket weave. It is liked for soft-collared summer sports styles, but as it also tailors well and is a solid color, shirts made of oxford are often worn with a tie and coat for business.

Among the business shirtings that are widely used in plain white, broadcloth is probably our friend Henry's preference. The bulletin says, "Broadcloth has a crosswise ribbed appearance, and is a closely woven durable fabric that launders and tailors well. Most of the medium - and good-quality broadcloths are mercerized." That term refers to a chemical treatment that strengthens the yarn and gives it a smooth, lustrous finish.

A few pages farther on in the bulletin we learn that good quality broadcloth usually has a yarn count of at least 130 yarns per inch in the wrap and 56 in the filling. Low-grade broadcloths are rarely mercerized and any luster they have is due to heavy pressing and is not permanent. There are also materials called broadcloth with a much lower yarn count, and without the characteristic ribbed appearance. Such fabrics will not give as good service as the higher count broadcloths, and they lose their attractive appearance on laundering.

Now here's an explanation of one difference between madras and percale. In Madras the pattern on stripes are woven, and run all through the fabric. In percale



they are printed, on one side only. Percale, for that reason, is more likely to fade than madras. In selecting madras, the bulletin says to be sure that the stripes are smooth and flat. If they are cordlike and form ridges, they will wear off long before the main part of the fabric. The best grades of madras are lightweight, smooth, and firm, and they tailor and launder well. The lower grades are harsh, coarse, and extremely hard to iron.

You can tell Chambray by the colored up-and-down yarns and the white cross-wise ones. The general effect is that of a solid color. It has a fairly well-balanced weave, with about the same number of yarns in each direction. Lightweight chambray is a good fabric for business and dress shirts, as it wears very well, and its smooth, soft texture makes it tailor and launder well. In heavier weights, chambray is a good fabric for work shirts except for out-door work in very cold climates.

Then there's a special kind of madras mentioned, called "end-to-end" madras. It looks something like chambray. The difference is that the up-and-down yarns are alternately white and colored. The filling yarns are white, and the general effect is that of tiny all-over checks, instead of a solid color. End-to-end madras is much like chambray in weave, and in wearing and washing qualities.

Covert is a practical material for heavy work shirts. It is firm, closely woven, heavy, and long wearing, but is much harder to launder than chambray.

I'll have to save the rest of this bulletin for another talk. There's a lot in it about design and workmanship. And I certainly hope my friend Isabel will read the section on boys' shirts and blouses so that Junior won't copy his father and "blow a fuse" when she shops for him!

Meantime, anyone can get a copy of the bulletin for herself by writing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture. Ask for Farmers' Bulletin 1837-F, Cotton Shirts for Men and Boys.

